

VZCZCXRO1636
RR RUEHLN RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHDBU #1706/01 2561130
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 131130Z SEP 06
FM AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8570
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 1816
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1817
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1761
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1813
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 1774
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1703
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1798
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1517
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1535
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RHMFIUU/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1329
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1730
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1784
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS 1086
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW 0018
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 9982

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 001706

SIPDIS

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STATE FOR SCA/CEN, DS/DSS/ITA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: ROCK AND ROLL IN DUSHANBE

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¶1. What could cause Tajikistan's youth to swell with anger, defy laws prohibiting mass gatherings and demonstrations, and take to the streets of Dushanbe? Were they protesting non-transparent election practices in Tajikistan leading up to the presidential election in November? Were they angry over the high unemployment that sends hundreds of thousands to Moscow as labor migrants? Or were they embittered by oppressive restrictions stunting freedom of the media? No! Tajikistan's teens were enraged when Iranian-born pop star Arash was a no-show at the national Independence Day celebration concert.

¶2. On the night of September 10, the 50,000-strong crowd in Dushanbe's Frunze stadium erupted into what sources call "mass disorder." Sources say audience members at the free concert became upset when the internationally renowned pop star failed to show up. They began to throw bottles and objects at substitute performers on stage. As a result of the chaos within the stadium, 30 law enforcement employees and 20 civilians were injured, according to sources at the Ministry of Interior. Young men in the audience poured out of the stadium and approximately half of the crowd proceeded en masse toward the city center. The crowd, mostly teenagers, threw rocks at vehicles and about 2,000 made their way downtown.

¶3. In a country where mass gatherings, protests and demonstrations are illegal without official written permission from the government, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Security officials dispatched law enforcement officers within half an hour. Officials quelled the incident peacefully within two and a half hours, detaining 36 people.

¶4. Arash, the singer at the center of it all, publicly apologized on national television late that night for not

performing. His band's flight was delayed. President Rahmonov had invited the singer to perform for Tajik Independence Day celebrations in Dushanbe and Kulob. The singer promised to perform September 11 at noon in lieu of the canceled show. Security was intense at the stadium. Approximately one thousand security officials were on hand, each with a baton and some with guard dogs chomping at the bit to curb any sign of unruly behavior. Authorities confiscated water bottles and evicted rowdy spectators from the stadium. Besides doing the wave at least eight times, the crowd was subdued and wary of authorities and the hour-long concert ended peacefully.

COMMENT:

¶5. While the reason the young men took to the streets was apolitical, it does speak volumes of the changing attitudes of this large Tajik demographic. Young men suffer from Tajikistan's high unemployment and are becoming the new emerging voice of the country. Tajiks who lived through the civil war, recoil from demonstrations or provoking authority, but this younger generation may have selective or little memory of the civil war to hold them back.

¶6. Although security officials cautiously handled the situation, and managed to handle the crowd peacefully, what was obvious from the police reaction and subsequent strategy was that they lack crowd control experience, equipment, and training. Authorities showed they were not taking any chances by increasing force at the September 11 concert. Hopefully this incident will not be a sign to the government to ban future concerts. Arash's popularity and the prevalence in Tajikistan of Persian music from western-based pop stars show that pop culture can be a tool to introduce western ideas and engage an ever-growing and youthful population that is extremely isolated and poor.

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END COMMENT.

SIGNATURE
JACOBSON